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WAR SUFFERERS'
RELIEF BULLETIN

"Not to be ministered unto, but to minister"

July, 1946 — Vol. II No. 5

A Day in a Refugee Camp

By Elma Esau

Ding! Ding! Between six and six-thirty each morning bells or gongs awaken the sleeping men, women, and children in more than one hundred refugee camps scattered over the country of Denmark. Most of these refugees are from the Danzig area from which they were evacuated in March and April of last year when the Russians took over that part of Germany. Amongst these 200,000 refugees are more than 1,500 Mennonites. Let us now imagine we are spending a day visiting our brethren in faith in one of these camps.

Most of the camps are large barracks camps, usually former army camps. Some are former vacation camps, hotels, gymnasiums, or school buildings. In the barracks camps there are usually smaller rooms for each family or for a family group. In the larger buildings, many materials and supplies, and much time and effort has been spent on the part of Denmark to take up these refugees.

The six-thirty bell announcing that hot tea is ready awakened only the last sleepers. There may have been stirrings and commotion for over an hour. Over in the far corner perhaps a child has been ill during the night and needed special attention. On this side of the hall a mother arose early to be prepared for her turn in the laundry room. And over there a man arose at five to begin his day's work in the furnace room. Now there is a hum of action over the entire hall as clothes are quickly slipped on in bed. Youngsters climb down from the second and third decks of their wooden bunks, and older folks emerge from behind the paper hanging of the lower bunks. There is a scurry to find teapots, and some member of each family is sent off to the kitchen to fetch a pot of hot tea for breakfast. In the meantime, others go to the wash rooms to queue for washing or to take a bit of cold water to their rooms for washing. Once each week there is hot water for a bath.

The family gathers in their own special nook for breakfast. The family may be an old grandfather, an aunt, a daughter-in-law, and some children. Very often one finds several Mennonite families together. The dishes are few and simple, but there may also be fine china, depending on what was brought along on the flight from their bombed homes. All have hearty appetites and eat their bread with a relish known to those who have experienced hunger.

After breakfast the occupations of the day begin. The routine work may be divided according to rooms or according to barracks. The men take their turns at keeping the grounds clean, hauling fuel and supplies, building or repairing, and acting as watchmen on the grounds. The women prepare vegetables, clean the halls and washrooms, and care for the camp garden, or in some cases they may have their own gardens. Some give their full time to kitchen work or help in the care of the orphan children, the sick, or the

aged people. There are also those who were teachers, doctors, nurses, and office workers by profession. Many of these now continue their work among the refugees.

When the routine work of the morning is finished, each mother is busy caring for her family. Some time must be spent in tidying and cleaning the family corner or room. Tears must be mended in the heavy paper which hangs around the beds to give a bit of privacy.

Keeping the family clothing intact and clean occupies much time. The bit of clothing which was taken from home for a two or three weeks' absence has now had to serve for over a year. Babies and children have long ago outgrown their clothing. Very little clothing other than used military suits and blankets has been available. From these and other scraps of cloth every conceivable kind of clothing has been made. Threads ravelled from scraps of cloth are used for mending, knitting, and even for sewing. However, such thread (a very rare and precious article) is often not strong enough to sew sturdy seams. Old knitted garments are unravelled and reknit. Even threads from bandages and old hose are knit into useful articles of clothing. Shoes are made with wooden soles and scraps of leather. It is often said that a refugee can make anything.

During the course of each morning a gong is sounded that all children may receive their daily portion of milk. At a certain hour mothers of small children may obtain hot water for bathing the babies and washing the baby clothes.

A stir is going through the camp—the mail has come! Who has had a letter from home? Who has found traces of a long lost relative? The letters are soon distributed, and the news, both the sad and the glad, is shared with friends and relatives.

Ding! Ding! The dinner bell! From all sides swarm children, men and women carrying containers to fetch their one-half liter of hot food per person for their noon meal. This may be a vegetable stew, gritz, mashed potatoes, potatoes boiled in their jackets and gravy, or some other hot food. In season there may also be fresh vegetables from the camp garden. In some camps the campees may have the opportunity of preparing a part of their meal in their own room as best suits their individual tastes.

From one to three is quiet hour. All children must nap or be quiet. It is the one period during the day in which there is a bit of peace and quiet in the large rooms. Then is the time for reading, letter writing, or a restful nap. On a sunny day many people spend the afternoon in the sunshine sewing, knitting, reading, making some bit of craftwork or working in their garden plots.

Children seem to enjoy camp life. There are always many playmates. Here and there one sees a treasured doll or a tattered truck which has made the long journey from home with its young owner. There are toys, too, which have been carefully made from bits of wood by an old grandfather or an older brother. Several hours each day are spent in school. The school building may be a wooden barrack just like all the other buildings in the camp, but the best is made of the situation so that the education of the children is not neglected.

Each afternoon the barrack or room leader distributes bread, butter, sausage, and cheese rations. Once a week there is sugar, sometimes fish, other times fresh vegetables, soap, thread or the camp newspaper.

Ding! Ding! The 4:30 tea bell! Again the pitchers and teapots are brought for tea for the evening meal of bread, sausage and cheese. At eight another bell—it is bedtime for the children. When all is quiet, the grownups have time for a stroll during the long summer evenings. There may be language classes, plays, Bible classes, choir practices, a group sing or a concert.

So the days and weeks pass within the bounds of a refugee camp with almost no exit except for visits to the hospital, the cemetery or a special doctor. Yet time seems to pass rather quickly. Sundays and holidays are observed with Christian services. Weddings, funerals and baptisms also enter into camp life. Our Mennonite ministers have the opportunity of traveling to the various camps to conduct these services among the Mennonite people. And at 10:30 or 11:00 the day ends by the ringing of a bell . . . lights out!

WAR SUFFERERS' RELIEF BULLETIN is published monthly by the Mennonite Central Committee. It is distributed without cost to anyone desiring information regarding Mennonite relief activities. Address all communications to the editor, John A. Hostetler, Akron, Pa.
Printed in U.S.A.

Thinking about Relief

Can Mennonitism Survive

the distress of war, totalitarianism, and the pressure of modern times? Of the 190,000 Mennonites in Europe before the war most of them were caught directly in the war path. The story of the survival, hardship, and bitter experience of the remaining ones is slowly unfolding. It is a sorrowful and touching one. Many of them have for years been going from place to place, facing the hardships of travel, adverse circumstances, and the torments of disappointment. About 400 are now in the American sector of Berlin, 400 are in Holland, about 1,500 are in Denmark (figures are approximate), and other groups have recently been discovered in the vicinity of Munich and Austria. They are hoping and praying for a new place to establish their homes where they can live in peace and serve their God in accord with the dictates of conscience. The number of our brethren remaining in Russia is unknown, but it appears that those who remain will gradually be absorbed by communism or suffer extermination.

Once again history has repeated itself. Another chapter will be added to the story of Mennonite migrations, and to the faith which has caused Christians to be flung to the far corners of the earth. S. C. Yoder in his last chapter of **For Conscience Sake** says "Trouble and sorrow endured for what one believes is not the worst that can happen to a people."

The folly of trusting in or seeking satisfaction in material possessions has been demonstrated anew and we remind ourselves again that "the trial of our faith is precious." We in America have had no bitter persecutions and we have had no great physical disruptions such as our brethren in Europe. God has blessed us for a purpose, and to this household of faith we have a great responsibility. Perhaps never before in the history of Mennonitism was there a greater opportunity to minister to the needs of our Mennonite brethren in the birthplace of our faith and heritage.

Our supplies of material gifts can reach many of them through our regular relief channels and God can answer their cry if we pray for them.—Editor

Why Relief Work?

Perhaps this question is already satisfactorily answered in your mind but I believe it is wise for all of us concerned, the givers and the workers, periodically to check the reasons for relief work to the end that the projects we sponsor fulfill the ends we desire. I want to emphasize that these are my personal opinions and any one is free to disagree.

I believe relief work should be limited to the provision of that which the recipient cannot provide for himself. Paul emphatically endorsed the principle that a man should labor to provide the things that he and his own require (I Tim. 5). In so far as possible, normal economic processes should be permitted and encouraged to function. It is always legitimate to ask, "Is there some other way in which this need may be met?" To help someone to help himself is more difficult than to give alms but I think we should definitely explore such possibilities.

We should not do relief work in order to feed our own egos. Of course we all enjoy the feeling of a task well done; we feel good when we can see how a gift is appreciated; truly it is more blessed to give than to receive. But I fear it is possible to reach that place where the Pharisees stood who enjoyed the honor that people gave them for their praying, their fasting and their alms. Shall we lose the spiritual reward by seeking the reward in this world only (Matt. 7)?

Neither is the advertising of the Mennonite Church a good reason to engage in relief work. It is natural to desire that those who so unjustly criticized us during the war years should recognize our willingness to sacrifice for the common good. Emphasis on the Mennonite Church is after all an emphasis on a division of the Church of Christ, albeit a division whose continuation is necessary to protect Scriptural truths. Paul rebuked the Corinthians for emphasizing their divisions, saying that they were of Paul or of Apollos, rather than their unity, which was in Christ (I Cor. 1). In our service we must emphasize Christ the Head rather than Menno Simon who watered.—H. C. Yoder

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War is a wicked, hateful, abominable business.—Menno Simons

Mennonite Refugees in Germany

By Robert Kreider

I have not yet shared with you what may stand as one of our major contributions during our first months in Germany. I prefer to speak little about it until the critical hours are passed. It is the plight of our Russian-born Mennonites in the city of Berlin and our efforts to bring them security and help them toward new homes in a new land. I shall never forget that evening when I first met our refugee brethren in Berlin. I groped my way through darkened passageways, from room to room in an old apartment house until I found the place where the "Fluchtling" were housed. I heard voices and through the casement I could see candle light. I knocked. The sound of voices was hushed and the light went out in the room beyond. No one answered the knocking. The Haus Frau came and knocked loudly and called that an American visitor had come. The door opened a wee crack and an old lady peeked out. The door was shut again. We knocked again and as the door opened I said that I was a Mennonite from America. The elderly lady opened the door wide and I stepped in. There in the gloomy darkness I saw about a dozen people, mostly women and children. They eyed me half-fearfully. Before the Haus Frau took leave, she asked me whether I could not get some food for these people because they had no ration cards and they were hungry. Soon I was telling them who I was, where I came from, what I was doing in Germany. The walls of reserve melted away and they received me cordially as their cousin from across the seas. They began to relate the story of their bitter years; their life in Russia, the German invasion, the retreat westward, the months in the Russian Zone of Occupation, and now slipping stealthily into Berlin in the frantic hope that this would be an island of safety. They have an unmistakable "Mennonite appearance," these rugged, blond peasant folk.

Some 200 live in modest comfort at an U.N.R.R.A. camp. An almost equal number have lived crowded together in a dingy apartment of the city—constantly plagued by hostile city officials. Long ago these folk would have been sent to the East had there not been two or three Allied officials who courageously backed these people.

We set to work on the problem. There were conferences with high and "less high" military men, telephone calls to our offices in Europe, cables to America. All this helped to give security and status to these refugees. There is increasing promise now that the way will open for them to migrate. This next week a Mennonite DP camp is being established in Berlin, through the kind concern of American military government and through the fact that we have been able to establish a food supply line from MCC warehouses outside Germany. Clearance has been secured for Peter Dyck to go into the city on a more permanent basis . . . . There have been moments of deep discouragement. There has been the anxiety of long distance negotiation. But now some answers are being found to our problems. Many a prayer of thanksgiving have I lifted up in gratitude for what seems to be the providential handiwork of God.

Several evenings ago as guest in my room was one of these refugees from Russia. His is a personal history more fascinating than fiction. Born in the rich agricultural Molotschna colony in the early 1890's . . . well-educated . . . a C.O. in medical service during World War I . . . close friend of young Tolstoyans . . . manager for several years of the progressive Mennonite agricultural improvement association of Russia . . . representative in Moscow for his people who were escaping to the West during and after the Revolution . . . in 1928 imprisoned in Moscow with no trial, only the ill-founded charge that he was an anti-communist propagandist . . . transferred from prison to prison, including one and a half years in a concentration camp of Siberia . . . unexpectedly released from prison in 1940 . . . living for a year and a half in Smolensk and then the war and the German invasion . . . his wife and son still in Russia, having not heard from them since 1941 . . . Despite all the suffering this man has known, his heart is entirely free of bitterness. It is spiritually humbling to come into the presence of such a winsome, Christlike spirit as his. He is among those good folk whom we hope to be able to assist.

Unbelief can refuse to face facts, but it cannot destroy them.—J. C. Wenger

Notes from the Field

Bearing Testimony

An interesting contact was made in Holland when a relief worker attempted to purchase some goods in a store and after considerable language difficulty was assisted by a young lady standing nearby. The conversation continued and the young Hollander inquired about the Mennonites and in a brief way learned about the clothing gifts and the relief work of the M.C.C. and was invited to the distribution center.

"Someone said she followed the poor people from her neighborhood to see what this invitation for food and clothing as a gift from Mennonites in Canada and America could possibly mean, as indicated on the card 'in the name of Christ.' She came and learned about the spirit and purpose of the work and was invited to come to the Sunday evening meeting. She came the second time because she found that the power of the spiritual outlook and the wholesome fellowship were something for which she was hungry. On this occasion she asked if one of the workers would come to her apartment, visit with herself and her mother, and carefully tell her mother about Mennonites. Two of us went with the girl to the apartment in a crowded urban area. The one room served as kitchenette, office, dinette, living room and bedroom.

"We talked of many things. They had been in Germany during the war. The girl became a dangerous political prisoner of the Nazis, and was condemned to die in a prison in Munich. But she said that with her doom drawing near she explored the possibility of prayer life and found God unlike anything she could ever tell. She felt that in spite of the murderous bombing, God still found a way to save her by opening up the prison walls for her and she found her mother and slowly they made their way across the fighting zones to the Netherlands. Since then she has been unable to develop much along the line of growth in God, but she has been alert to every possibility for help. And when she said that she had not been taught nor learned of Christ or God when she was a child, her mother interfered, and apologized saying she didn't think it was right for parents to decide whether the child should become Protestant or Catholic. That opened for us an opportunity to talk about Menno Simons' challenge to express that infant baptism was not correct and for that conviction as well as others he left the Catholic church and others followed him in his belief, and that people should in their own intelligent understanding, conviction, and desire, confess their love for Christ, their sinfulness, need of Christ as Saviour, and their willingness to follow Him at whatever cost in life. We talked of many things, applying Christian living in daily life. Because we desire to be consistent, to be positive in our working for Christ has brought us all into relief work; too, it is the root of the reason why our Mennonite people in the United States and Canada are so willing to give, and why, if we have followed Christ in this way before the war we cannot do otherwise though war should come. Therefore we asked for a work of constructiveness and not destructiveness for our young men, and for the opportunity to do relief among any and all that are in need. The hour of 10:00 came only too quickly, and when we were ready to leave, the daughter and mother generously invited us to come again, and the mother hungrily, but reluctantly, asked if she might come to the Sunday evening meeting with her daughter. The next Sunday evening they came after walking more than an hour to get there. The mother was most moved by the prayer and our thoughts on the subject of a dedicated life. They could not follow in the singing but could understand the words very well. We hope they will come again. Especially the daughter wants to come."—Ruth Hilty

New Groups Discovered

In a letter from Robert Kreider, Mennonite relief worker in Germany, we learn that new groups of Mennonite D.P.'s have been discovered. An effort is being made to secure names of all the displaced Mennonites. Many have been found in the vicinity of Munich and approximately 300 are located in a near-by U.N.R.R.A. Camp. These Mennonites had been in the British zone near the Dutch border and were returned to the Munich area. Another group of about 115 were found in a refugee camp near Munich who are being cared for by German civil authorities. Those in the U.N.R.R.A. camp are well provided for, but it is said they are in

grave anxiety as to their future. The needs of others are not being taken care of.

Michael Horsch, brother of the late Mennonite historian John Horsch, is chairman of the Bavarian Mennonite relief committee known as Christen Phlicht. This organization has assisted the Mennonite D.P.'s and is paying the expenses of two Russian Mennonite ministers and a nurse to minister to the needs of the people throughout Bavaria. The insecurity of these folk has been that they are D.P.'s "without destination" and therefore face the possibility of forced repatriation.

There is no factual information on the number of Mennonite D.P.'s in Austria but information received states that segments are scattered throughout that country. Several hundred are estimated to be in that area.

Prisoners of War

A minister recently visited several Russian Mennonite prisoners of war in this country. He reports, "Characteristic of all reports of the plight of our Russian brethren, these young men also told of how the Mennonites have been suffering, thousands upon thousands having been sent into exile. (They use the word 'Verschleppt' which is more meaningful than 'exile.') When one asks them about the settlements and our people they simply answer, **'Ache,** they are all gone.'

"Yet it is significant that these men sought each other out, that they are very conscious of the fact that they are Mennonites, and that they variously estimate the number of German-speaking peoples who returned with the German forces (or otherwise) from 30,000 to 40,000 of which the majority, they claim, were Mennonites. They reported various reactions when the German army pressed into Russia in 1941. Many Mennonite villages were vacated in advance of the armies. Some hid in their homes or some other place until the territory was occupied. Some in one way or another became an integral part of the German people, were either forced back with the Germans or went voluntarily."

A Letter From Germany

The following letter from a Russian Mennonite mother in Germany was received by a party in North America (translated from Mennonitische Rundschau):

Dear Parents, Brothers and Sisters:

We wish you all the best of health in body and in soul, which those of us who are still living also have. My five children and I are in Germany. Would very much like to know who of you are still living. The letter in which you wrote about sister Helen's death and the picture that you sent with the letter was received in 1941. My daughter Helena who is 18 years of age, disappeared while on flight to Germany. We do not know whether or not she is still alive. My husband has been missing for seven years now. I have four sons, 16, 14, 12, and 10 years of age. Agnes is 8 years of age. Dear sisters and brothers, if mother and dad are not living any longer, which I don't expect, please write to me as soon as possible and tell me how you all are.

I have experienced much sorrow in my life. My mother-in-law died in 1942. Are my brother-in-law Peters, and P. Peters Thiessen still living?

I have become old in my youth. No one would believe that I am still young. We have been on flight now for two years. How have you all been during these past years?

I haven't written for many years because I couldn't, but now I hope to hear from you again. If at all possible I would very much like to come to Canada if you could give me security. We are in the British Zone now.

With love and greetings,

Agnes and children

Later:

Dear Father:

This is our last evening in Germany. Tomorrow we will be on our way back to Russia. Oh mother, mother! Pray for your children! I find no words today to write to you. I shall remember you all until death.

SWEDEN ACTIVE IN POLISH RELIEF

London.—Embarking on one of the largest relief programs for Poland, the Swedish International Relief Committee has put 20 three-ton trucks into service carrying material landed by Swedish vessels at the Polish port of Gydnia. One complete 480-bed hospital has been delivered and two others are on the way. Together with X-ray and electro-therapeutic equipment 20,000 hospital beds complete with mattresses and sheets are also being delivered. —Worldover Press

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If there remains unreached one person either physically or spiritually hungry when we could feed him, we have failed in our divine responsibility.—John Yoder

Peace Notes

Is The Nonresistant Christian a Parasite?

Today's militarists, like those of old, freely assert that the nation would be ruined if everyone took the stand which nonresistant Christians take . . . . The nonresistant Christian (Reinhold Niebuhr says) is a parasite who lives on those who do the dirty work required to bring a semblance of order out of our ever-present chaos.

The first answer to this challenge must be that it is the primary duty of the Christian to be a true disciple of Christ. Once the premise is accepted that Christ speaks with authority from heaven, only one thing remains, and that is to obey His command. There may be times when some other course seems more practical, more reasonable, or socially more useful. It often happens, however, that the way which from a human point of view seems best, in the end proves to have been wrong. The Book of Proverbs says: "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." The true disciple believes this truth so firmly that he follows Christ even though the entire world seems to be against him. Knowing that human reason has often gone astray, he hitches his wagon to the star of divine revelation, and leaves the results in the hands of God. Such obedience is not a blind obedience. Christian faith is not a blind faith. It is belief based on evidence. And to the nonresistant Christian the evidence seems clear enough that the way of life prescribed by Christ is also the way which is best for human society. He is convinced that if he is true to his nonresistant profession, he is not a parasite. (From **War, Peace, and Nonresistance** by Guy F. Hershberger.)

Josephus and War

In A. D. 70 the Jews were besieged by the Romans and were tempted to resist by carnal weapons. Josephus warned them that never in the past had they gained anything by such resistance, nor would they now profit by it. The following selections are some of his words of warning which we today may well consider seriously:

"O miserable creatures! Are you so unmindful of those that used to assist you, that you will fight by your weapons, and by your hands against the Romans? When did we ever conquer any other nation by such means? And when was it that God who is the Creator of the Jewish people, did not avenge them when they had been injured . . . ?

"Shall I say nothing, or shall I mention the removal of our fathers into Egypt, who, when they were used tyrannically, and were fallen under the power of foreign kings for 400 years together, and might have defended themselves by war and by fighting, did yet do nothing but commit themselves to God . . . ?

"It was God who then became our general, and accomplished these great things for our fathers, and this because they did not meddle with war and fighting, but committed it to Him to judge about their affairs . . . .

"And to speak in general, we can produce no example wherein our fathers got any success by war, or failed of success when without war, they committed themselves to God . . . ."

Faith in What?

Society was for a long time sustained by an easy and optimistic view of human progress. Science was giving us increased control over the natural world and men were supposed to be gradually becoming kinder, more humane, and more tolerant. They felt that, though they themselves might not reap the fruits of their labors, their descendents would do so, and thus a feeling of social permanence and a sense of fulfillment were created.

The last thirty years have done much to destroy this comforting belief, and the realization that mankind now has the power of destroying itself will have far-reaching effects. The belief in automatic progress is breaking down and must be replaced by some faith which only Christianity can provide.—Selected

* * *

"Protestant churches are one of the three most racially segregated institutions in America," according to Dr. Will W. Alexander, former farm security administrator. The other two, he says, are the bar and medical associations.

Dr. Alexander says that churches are concerned about the race problem, but the fact that they have separate churches for Negroes and whites "undermines what goodwill and Christian brotherhood they preach on Sunday." He points out that children believe what they see, not what they are taught in school or what is preached to them in church.

MENNONITE COLONIZATION

Lessons From the Past For the Future

By Winfield Fretz

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The purpose of the booklet is to present a reliable picture of the total problem of Mennonite colonization, to learn from past mistakes, and to discover the factors that accounted for successes and failures. The study is significant in view of the impending and future movements of Mennonite peoples. Price: Single copies, 20¢; in quantities of 10 or more, 15¢. Available from Mennonite Central Committee, Akron, Pa.